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Medicine

THE
GOOD SAMARITAN:
A
SERMON,

DELIVERED IN
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, IN CEDAR-STREET,
NEW-YORK,

ON
SABBATH EVENING, JANUARY 28, 1810;

FOR THE
BENEFIT OF THE NEW-YORK DISPENSARY.

BY JOHN B. ROMEYN, D. D.

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NEW-YORK, *January 30, 1810.*

AT a Meeting of the Trustees of the New-York City Dispensary, it was unanimously resolved, that General Clarkson, Mr. John Watts, and Dr. David Hosack, be a Committee to communicate to the Rev. Dr. J. B. Romeyn the thanks of this Board, for his excellent Sermon, delivered on Sunday evening, the 28th inst. for the benefit of this Institution; and that a copy of the Discourse be requested for publication.

By order of the Board,

M. CLARKSON, CHAIRMAN.

THE
GOOD SAMARITAN, &c.

LUKE x. 37.

Then said Jesus unto him, Go and do thou likewise.

THE model here exhibited for imitation is a good Samaritan. Our Lord, in a parable, represents him as showing mercy to an unfortunate Jew, regardless of the political and religious differences which existed between the two nations*. To “go and do likewise,” is therefore simply to fulfil the divine law, which says, “ thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself†.”

Though this precept be thus of the highest authority, it is hostile to the spirit of the world, which lieth in wickedness. Selfishness and pride stamp their character, who are “strangers from the Covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world‡;” insensibility to human sufferings marks their conduct. Man, without the word of God, is a comparative stranger to the sweet influence of humanity. Prone to suspicion, he views his brother as a rival or an enemy. Indisposed to sacrifice his personal interest or convenience, he has

* John iv. 9. † Matt. xxii. 39. ‡ Eph. ii. 12.

no tears for the miserable ; no provisions for the destitute. Let him be civilized in comparison with his fellows, he is still a stern, ferocious savage : in war terrible, in peace unamiable.

What were the ancient Greeks and Romans ? We have been taught from our infancy to admire them. They exhibited many specimens of moral grandeur ; they were polished, humanized above the other nations of the world. But the Spirit of God has pronounced them “ full of murder, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful*.” Their history illustrates the truth of this character, sad as it is, in the most affecting manner. They considered barbarians, that is, all beside themselves, as their natural enemies. They butchered captives in cold blood, or sold them for slaves. They exposed new born infants to birds and beasts of prey on mountains and in woods, and suffered the maimed and illegitimate to perish through hunger. These crimes, for such they assuredly are, were countenanced and abetted by their sages ; by no less characters than Plato and Aristotle. In the famed institutions of Solon and Lycurgus, no provision was made for suffering humanity. The latter especially taught his people to delight in blood ; he trained them up for murder. Among the Romans, parents had the right of life and death over their children, given them by law. Slaves were at the absolute

disposal of their masters. Creditors might fetter their debtors; scourge them, and exercise various cruelties on their bodies. The very religion and amusements of these polished savages tended to harden their hearts, and make them cruel. They delighted in gladiatorial shows; shows of pain, of blood, and of death. They offered human sacrifices to their gods, immolating on the altars of a barbarous superstition, bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh*. Among the nations surrounding them, the shade of inhumanity appears far deeper and more gloomy.

If we descend to modern times, we shall find no more benevolence displayed among the heathen, than there was in former times. Even the mild and inoffensive Hindoos, as they are called, of whom infidelity has made frequent mention with applause—even they are brutally unfeeling to distress. “I have found,” says an eye witness, “I have found the path-way stopped up by sick and wounded people, perishing with hunger, and that in a populous neighbourhood, where numbers pass by, some singing, others talking, but none showing mercy†.” Among them, also, infants, in defiance of natural affection, are exposed helpless and forlorn to perish‡. On a review of these awful facts, we cannot help exclaiming, “Truly there is no flesh in

* Leland’s Advantage and Necessity of Religion, Vol. ii. p. 2.
Chap. 3 and 4.

† Mr. Thomas. See Baptist period. acc. Vol. i. p. 291.

‡ Baptist per. accounts, throughout.

man's obdurate heart." He has no bowels of mercy; he knows not himself; he knows not God as a reconciled Father.

Wherever the word of God is known, and its power experienced, the scene is changed; for there the command of the text is obeyed. The religion of this word, true religion, is a grand system of benevolence. Its design is to destroy the reign of sin, and repair the ruin of the fall. Whilst it communicates the glad tidings of pardon for our guilt, and cleansing for our pollutions, it softens the heart naturally hard, excites pity for the afflicted, and irresistibly leads to the offices of mercy. It gives consequence to the poor; stains the pride of the affluent; and brings low the lofty imaginations of man. It teaches us we are all brethren, sprung from the same parents, however diversified our state, or country, or appearance, or habits; that riches or poverty happen at the wise disposal of God; that the former are given in trust to alleviate the distresses of the latter; that no one lives for himself, but for others also; that we must bear each others burdens; comfort each others hearts; and satisfy each others wants. The Holy Ghost gives efficacy to these truths, by shedding abroad the love of God in the heart. This is a steady principle, which overawing the passions, and swallowing up selfish concerns, constrains to the exercise of love and charity, independent of capricious feelings, the ties of relationship, or the

influence of circumstances. The character of God who is thus loved, as revealed in the word, is *love*. He causes his sun to shine upon the evil and the good ; and his rain to descend on the just and the unjust. He is good, and delights in goodness. To punish is his strange work. He is the avenger of the oppressed, the father of the fatherless, the protector of the poor, and the widow's God. Under the Mosaic economy, he, by specific regulations, provided for the needy, for orphans, for the stranger, for captives taken in war, for hired servants and slaves : thus causing the spirit of brotherly love to pervade every part of it. When he sent his Son into our world to establish a new economy, he sent him, not as a prince and potentate, but as a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. The glorious Redeemer, when he laid aside the splendours of the godhead, became poor. He who is the author of the universe, was born of an humble virgin, and laid in a manger. Correspondent with his birth was his life. He was poor, despised, rejected ; he had not where to lay his head. He associated with the poor ; drank of the cup of their affliction to the dregs ; and eat with them the bread of distress. To them he chiefly directed his attention. He softened the asperities of their lot, by the soothing offices of love. He wrought miracles in their behalf ; healing their infirmities, and furnishing them with food. To them he preached good tidings, salvation through his blood. Jewish Rabbies, contrary to their

law, and Pagan Sophists, neglected them. These characters courted the favour of the rich and mighty, but shunned the company of the poor; and, like the Priest and Levite, in the parable from whence the text is taken, passed by the objects of distress and misery. To such objects Jesus Christ went; he entered their abodes, however forbidding, carrying with him the consolations of his gospel. He sought out the poor; taught them the truth; and accommodated his instructions to their capacities. From among them he chose his disciples, the witnesses of his death and resurrection, the preachers of his name and cross. For them he made provision in his dispensation; condemning by his own word, or through the medium of his apostles, that avarice, or prudence as some think it, which withholds supplies from their wants; and applauding that charity which giveth liberally, and upbraideth not. He enjoined on his followers the duty of remembering the poor; and for their benefit his apostles, inspired by his spirit, established the practice of weekly alms-givings, as well as occasional contributions. To the seals of his covenant they are admitted; baptized in his name, and commemorating his death equally with the rich. What is done to them, he considers as done to himself. Their cause is his cause; and before the assembled universe, on the judgment day, he will reward charity to his poor, and punish the want of it.

Thus you see every thing in the word of God is calculated to engender benevolence, humanity, philanthropy. Through its influence, man beholds in his fellow man a brother. Heart springs to heart, and he goes and does as the good Samaritan did. Tell me not of the wars, bloodshed, and persecution, for which true religion has been the pretext! Whence come these, but from our lusts? They originate in the same baleful passions, and unhallowed prejudices, which lead men to reject the word and grace of God.

True religion ever has humanized men, and civilized society. How vastly superior, in every point of view, was the state of the Israelitish nation, in the purest periods of their history, to that of the most refined heathen nations! What a contrast! a contrast which can almost be felt between the two, especially in their attention to the unfortunate and the miserable*.

In Christian countries, the same superiority is still seen; the same contrast still exhibited. True religion has interwoven itself, as it were, in all their civil institutions; it has lessened the horrors of war, and imparted additional charms to the blessings of peace. It has worn off the rough edge of barbarian fierce-

* See this subject illustrated in the letters of certain Jews to Voltaire, Vol. 2. Lett. 3. and 4; and in Graves's Lectures on the four last books of the Pentateuch, part 2. Lect. 2, 3, 4.

ness, displayed even by the polished Greeks and Romans, and introduced a general urbanity and suavity of manners in all classes of society. It has removed that insensibility to human distress which is common among those who know not God, and produced the establishment of humane institutions, alms-houses, charity-schools, and hospitals. It has softened the rigours of parental authority, and divested law of its cruelty. Even those who affect to disbelieve it, feel its influence, and display it: for were it not for this religion, they would exhibit the same scenes which are exhibited by all who know not God. The very philanthropy and benevolence which these men possess, as far as it is genuine and not assumed, they derive from the religion which they reject.

Under the influence of this religion, characters like that of the Good Samaritan have been formed in every age. Who, that is conversant with his Bible, knows not the merciful deeds of Job. "When the ear heard me," said this prince of Uz, "then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me; because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy*." Thus also Nehemiah made the cause of the poor his own, and corrected the

abuses under which they suffered. With royal munificence he supported, beside his own household, multitudes of workmen and others, out of his own property. " Yet for all this, required not I, (says he,) the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people*." Zaccheus the publican, in later times, constrained by the same religion, stood before Christ and said, " Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor†." The primitive Christians were conspicuous for their tenderness to, and support of the afflicted and the needy. Their bitterest enemies exclaimed, " See how these Christians love each other." Hear the testimony of the apostate emperor‡. Writing to a friend§; he asks, " Why must we rest in what has been done, and not proceed to those advantages by which that base religion, [of Christ] has been promoted; I mean their charity and benevolence to strangers? It is quite shameful, that when we see those detestable Galileans not only take care of their own brethren, but extend their charity to those of our persuasion, that our people should want that assistance from us, to which they have a claim." In this passage we see the fact already stated, that the Romans were insensible to the distresses of the poor, substantiated, as well as the charity of Christians acknowledged. Of this love to each other, this kindness to the

* Neh. v. 18. † Luke xix. 8. ‡ Julian. § Arsacius.

miserable, the ancient fathers availed themselves in their writings. "We love one another," says the eloquent Minucius Felix, "because we have never learnt how to hate: we call each other brethren, because we are the servants of the one God, Father of all; associates in the same faith, and joint heirs of the same hope." He adds in another place, "he slays the most eligible victim that rescues a human creature from jeopardy. These are our sacrifices, and such are the rites with which we worship our God; and thus among Christians he is the most religious man, who is the justest*."

Rich believers, following the direction of their master, when they made a feast called the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind. The distresses of the sick were alleviated; captives were redeemed: even enemies were assisted. Individuals supported many hundreds. Christians then felt that their gold and silver was the Lord's, to be distributed by them, as stewards, for the promotion of his glory and the benefit of the poor. All classes of them, like the good Samaritan, showed mercy to the miserable†. The imitation of this example was not confined to the middle class; it extended to the wealthy; to the noble; yea, to princes. History records that the

* The same father charges the heathens with the crimes of cruelty and inhumanity, already noticed; giving in detail some most awful instances.

† Cave's Prim. Chris. Book III. Chap. 2.

Empress of Theodosius the Great, visited the sick in person, and with her own hands administered relief*.

That spirit which animated these Christians is not lost ; thanks to Jehovah, it still exists. It is a spirit originating in grace, and durable as God himself. It will survive the ruins of the world, and be consummated in eternity. Wherever pure religion is known, there must be exalted specimens of mercy. Modern times have produced a Waldo, who sold all his possessions for the benefit of poor believers† : a Vincent de Paul, styled the apostle of humanity, who, after having been a shepherd in his childhood, left to his country establishments of immense utility for the unfortunate‡ : a Howard, who, in the exercise of kindness to the miserable, perhaps approaches nearer to the glorious Redeemer than any of whom mention is made in the records of time.

But why mention names, or give facts in detail, to show that true religion still constrains its disciples to imitate the good Samaritan ? The occasion on which we are assembled in this place proves the fact : and from your alms-deeds this evening, I trust, it will be seen, that you delight in mercy. You are blessed in your basket and in your store ; have food to eat

* Cave's Prim. Christ. Book III. Chap. 2.

† Milner's Church History, Vol. iii. p. 416. Ame. Ed.

‡ Maury on Eloquence, Sect. 21.

and raiment to wear ; dwell at ease in your habitations, and enjoy worldly comfort. How many, in the midst of us, in this city, are destitute of all these blessings ! Their home, if any they have, is a hovel which scarcely shelters them from the pitiless storm ; or, perhaps, a damp cellar, with but little fuel to keep it dry. Their clothing hardly covers their nakedness, much less affords them warmth ; their scanty meals, procured with difficulty, only irritate the cravings of hunger, which call for more. Such are some of the evils experienced by the poor from day to day. If they have families, the evils are more insupportable ; for their wives and their children suffer with them. And, my hearers, the poor have feelings as well as we ; they are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh ; men of like passions with ourselves. Think not that public provision and individual assistance is sufficient to remove all these evils. Much is done in this awy, unquestionably, but not enough. The remedies, though ample, are not fully adequate to the disorders. Public provision is tardy, and individual assistance partial. You assist the poor, no doubt, when they come to your doors ; but do you search after them ? Will not your avocations, or your health, or your necessities permit this ? You ought then to rejoice that God disposes others to take this trouble on themselves for you. You ought cheerfully and liberally to support charitable institutions. One of these institutions, encouraged by a re-

collection of that generous disposition which has so long and so often been displayed by the inhabitants of this city, now solicits your aid.

The object of the New-York Dispensary is, to provide "assistance for that description of poor, " who, when deprived by disease of the earnings of "their daily labour, are also deprived of the means "of procuring the medical assistance necessary for "their relief*." The members thus show mercy to "the mechanic who cannot, without great inconve- "nience, leave his family, to reside in an hospital ; "the mother, who cannot be separated from her "children ; the tender infant, who requires the con- "stant care and assistance of a fond parent ; and "those who labour under chronic diseases, and are "thence not objects of the hospital†." Is not this institution, then, unquestionably, and pre-eminently laudable ? Does it not merit the most liberal, the most ample support ? Sickness, in the midst of competence, is a sore, a distressing evil. Full well do I know the pains of body, and anxiety of mind it occasions. My own experience has given a meaning, a force unknown before, to that blessed promise relative to the heavenly Jerusalem—" the inhabitant shall not say I

* Preface to the Charter, &c. of the New-York Dispensary.

† *Ditto.* About 20,000 sick persons have been attended by the physicians of the City Dispensary since its first establishment, and 2000 patients were prescribed for in the last year.

am sick*." But if, with every circumstance to alleviate its evils, sickness be so lamentable and mournful, how much more so must it be where these circumstances are wanting! To be poor is, of itself, afflictive; but to be sick as well as poor—my hearers, it is sad; inexpressibly sad! Among other instances in confirmation of this, I have, in the course of my life, seen in a small room, a father at the point of death, black through the power of a malignant disease; a mother lying at his side, unable to help him or herself; an infant at their feet, also sick; and one dead in the cradle! Thus miserable by sickness and death, they were more so by want, which withheld from sickness adequate comfort, and added tenfold horror to the grimness of death. This case is not solitary. In a city like this, many such occur from time to time. Your physicians, as well as your ministers, can testify to the mournful truth. Frequently they are called to witness scenes, which harrow up the soul with anguish. And will you withhold your aid to alleviate misery like this? Will you shut up your bowels of compassion to those who thus suffer? No: It cannot be.

No more of this world's goods is now solicited, than what you can spare from your own necessities. In assisting others, you are not required to injure yourselves. You need not fear that your contribu-

* Isaiah xxxiii 24.

tions will be misapplied ; for the charity is of such a nature, that there can be no deception.

Need I then use arguments to excite your liberality ? What ! arguments to enforce mercy to the sick poor, in a Christian land ; nay, in a sanctuary of the God of mercy ! and that too with sinners assembled to supplicate the exercise of mercy towards themselves from him whom they have offended ! I fondly hope your principles, as Christians ; your feelings, as men ; and your hopes, as sinners ; render them unnecessary. “ But this I say,” in the words of the apostle, “ he which soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly ; and he which soweth bountifully, shall reap also bountifully. Every man, according as he purposeth, in his heart, so let him give not grudgingly ; for God loves a cheerful giver*.”

“ The quality of mercy is not strain'd :
It droppeth, as the gentle rain from heaven,
Upon the place beneath it : it is twice bless'd ;
It blesseth him that gives, and him that takest.”

“ Give, then, and it shall be given unto you ; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom : for with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again†.”

* 2 Cor. ix. 6, 7. † Shakspeare.. ‡ Luke vi. 38

Presently HE who makes the cause of the poor his own, shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, and shall sit upon the throne of his glory. May you, through grace, be enabled so to improve your stewardship now, that then HE may say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, and inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*." Amen.

* Matt. xxv. 34.

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